

We want to admire the wonderfully crafted work of art that it is. We gaze at it for hours with abundantly thankful hearts, in awe of its beauty, in amazement at its design, in humble adoration of its creator. We are enraptured by the careful detail of the artist. We see how every single stroke of the brush has meaning, every hue is so carefully placed - with intention, with direction, with conviction, with passion. The picture that we are so content to gaze upon reveals to us the very heart of the artist. And the heart we see is full of a love so pure, that we cannot comprehend it. So we can only gaze, full of awe and wonder. Full of overwhelming appreciation. Full of a peace that we have never known before. Full of contentment in knowing that we will never be separated from the love in the heart of the artist. We cannot imagine ever taking our eyes off of this work of art. And so we gaze at it continually.

It's a picture of pure *GRACE*, painted by the hand of a loving, merciful God. He uses a brush that is made from the splintering wood of a cross. This masterpiece only has one color, and that color is **red**. The hues of red are painted with the blood of the artist's only begotten Son.

What makes this picture so beautiful is not what it contains, but rather, *what is missing* from it. In all of the details of the perfectly placed brushstrokes, on a canvas that is painted solid red - you will never see a trace of *your own sins*. The blood has been painted over them all, and they will *never be seen again*.

Have you ever seen the picture that the puzzle reveals?

Do you know what the picture means?

If so, do you still look at it? Do you still admire it?

Do you recognize the love that was put into it just for you?

Or does the memory of the glimpse you caught of that beautiful work of art just sit somewhere in the back of your mind, only to be referred to now and then as something you once viewed?

Fix your eyes on the *finished* work of art, the *completed* puzzle.

Stand in awe of this picture of *Grace* and never lose sight of it.

*Relish* in its beauty.

*Be amazed* at its craftsmanship.

*Rest* in its peace.

*See* the love that the Artist has for you.

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# The Puzzle

by Faith Searcy

We've all heard that puzzle analogy. You know, the one about how when we learn to study the scriptures in the way that God intended, it's like putting all of the pieces of a puzzle together so that you can finally see the picture. I believe it is a very accurate description. However, to me, there is more to it than just the thought of putting a jigsaw puzzle together.

So, here is my take on it:

I spent most of my entire life in the religious system, doing any and everything that I could possibly think of to "please God." Although I was unsaved for the duration of my time in that system, one of the things that I thought was pleasing to my creator was reading my Bible, trying to make sense of it as best I could by explaining away contradictions and "difficult" passages. I thought I knew my Bible backwards and forwards, from cover to cover. I learned of the most "prominent characters" and memorized verses. I could often quote, word for word, whatever scripture the preacher was reading during his sermon. When the pastor said to turn to a particular passage in the Bible, I could usually get there before anyone else in the congregation did (after all, I was the champion at "bible drills" at "Children's church" during my childhood years.) I always knew that my bible was precious, and that it was to be cherished. I even fell into all of those cliché superstitions about it. Like - you are always supposed to kiss your bible if it falls to the floor. -Or that it is bad luck to sit anything on top of it. I believed that if my house caught on fire, my bible would not get burned. I also believed that if I slept with my bible near me, that no harm would come to me during the night. -If it was a supernatural story about a bible, chances were - I would have believed it. I practically worshiped my bible. And I thought that God was pleased with me for that far and above any other "good" thing that I might have done for Him.

During those 30+ years of my ignorance in thinking that I was making God happy and being a "good" christian, I did retain a lot of knowledge of the scriptures. The problem was, I just didn't know where any of them fit. Hardly anything in the bible made any sense to me, but you usually wouldn't know that by hearing me talk (or so I had convinced myself.) While I probably "looked" pretty good to the outside world, toting my bible under my arm and quoting scriptures, what my brain really looked like was a mess. I had all of those verses just scattered around like a million-piece jigsaw puzzle just strewn all over the table. And the bigger problem was this - I had no "picture" to look at to see how the pieces fit together.

It was an overwhelming task to even begin trying to make these pieces fit - but yet I would pound them together, trying my hardest to make the picture visible. Sometimes, I'd come across a couple of pieces that looked like they

went together. They both would have some of the same markings, but they just wouldn't line up. So I would push them to the side and go onto other pieces.

There were times when I would find new pieces that didn't match up to any of the pieces that I had already collected. I didn't know it at the time, but these pieces weren't even part of the picture that I was trying to put together, and they would never fit any of the pieces that I already had. But I tried my best to be content in the thought that they would all fit together in the end, somehow - and that I just probably wouldn't know where some of the pieces fit during this lifetime. I would have to wait for God to explain it to me in heaven someday.

I came to a point in my life, just a few years ago, where I grew weary of trying to complete the puzzle - and I became too tired to search for any more pieces. So I tried to become at peace with believing that I was as close to getting the puzzle completed as I would ever be, and that I probably would never see the full picture on this side of eternity. I was ready to say goodbye to my desire to look at the finished product, to see the artwork that the pieces would reveal. I decided that I must find a way to be content with just not knowing. And I was almost there - to my comfortable complacency, until...

I saw one puzzle piece, one that I had collected many years ago. I had swept it aside - it seemed to be quite benign, and I really thought that it matched up with no other pieces in my collection. It was a familiar piece, one that had been looked at several times, but it seemed to have no other ties to the others. It had no special features that would identify it with special features on the other pieces. It seemed to sit all by itself, separated, and yet it must be connected to something. I looked hard at this piece. I studied it closely. I used a magnifying glass to examine every single detail. Suddenly - there was the answer. This single piece contained all of the instructions I needed to categorize all of the other pieces and fit them together. This single piece was the "guide" for the puzzle. It had been there, in my collection, the whole time. Overlooked, pushed aside, and minimized, in favor of the more "interesting" pieces. How arrogant I was to ignore it. How prideful I was to push it aside. How ignorant I was to minimize it. I had treated the very instructions for putting the puzzle together as if they were unimportant. But the answer was there the entire time. I just wasn't looking for it. I was too busy trying to force puzzle pieces together that did not fit, causing the puzzle to look nothing like the work of art that it is.

With my new found tool, I excitedly started putting the pieces in the correct categories, and then matching them together perfectly. My picture was becoming more and more beautiful with each matching piece. And while in amazement at the ease in which the pieces snapped together perfectly, I began to ask, "Why didn't anyone ever tell me this during all of my years of collecting pieces?" The thought that so many people kept this vital information from me for all of this time angered me immensely. I could not imagine what kind of human being would withhold this from me. I sought for so long, and others that seemed to have their puzzle put together never

told me how to do this. Why not? Why wouldn't they want me to know how to finally get to see the picture? Why would someone who is supposed to be helping me with the puzzle, keep this from me?

Then, I realized something. A profound enlightenment. They never told me because they didn't know either. They had never completed the puzzle, although they acted as if they had. They had never seen the picture, but they claimed to know exactly what it looks like. They didn't know. They had never noticed the piece with the instructions. They had never recognized it as a guide for the puzzle. It is likely that they never will. I went from being immensely angry at them, to immediately becoming sad. How many others will never complete the puzzle? How many others will never see the picture?

I was consumed with the task of completing the puzzle. I wanted so badly to see the picture that I had longed to see all of my life. How overjoyed I was to know that I could finally see the picture that the finished product would reveal, rather than believing that I would only spend the rest of my life wondering what to do with the pieces that I had collected.

The image was coming together quickly. I could finally see what it was, and the more pieces that started coming together, the quicker the others found their place- until, finally, it was done. The picture was in full view. The puzzle complete. It was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. I could do nothing but gaze. I could not take my eyes off of it. I felt as though I could look at it forever, and never tire of it. The artist of the picture that was revealed to me had put all of His own heart into the masterpiece that I was gazing at. And to think - this beautiful picture was there the whole time. Scattered among the puzzle pieces, just waiting for me to see it.

For so long, I thought the artist wanted to keep His work of art a secret. But I was so wrong. He meant for me to see it. After all, He created it just for me.

This is why I see more to the simple puzzle analogy than just a mere jigsaw waiting to be solved. I've carried these pieces around with me all of my life, not knowing what to do with them, and longing to see the finished product. Finally, I see the picture, and I get the joy of admiring the workmanship of the artist.

It's been a few years since I first caught a glimpse of the picture. But I still can't take my eyes off of it. I'm still amazed by it, and I don't want to look at anything else.

There are some who have learned to put the puzzle together, but they are no longer in admiration of the beautiful picture. I think some have grown bored with looking at it, while others may have never really wanted to look at it in the first place. There are some who only want the pride of saying that they were able to complete the puzzle. I think that there are others who are trying to put puzzles together that have no pictures. And there are some who try to create pictures that they have drawn up in their mind, while in reality, there are no pieces that make the picture that they are seeking.

Then there are the few of us, who just can't get past that beautiful picture. -The one that we *so* wanted to see completely for as long as we can remember. We don't *want* to get past it.